



# SQUEAMISH

BY AARON MARK



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SQUEAMISH  
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*For Alison Fraser*

SQUEAMISH was originally produced Off-Broadway by All For One Theater (Michael Wolk, Artistic Director; Nick Cotz, Producing Director), opening on October 16th, 2017, at the Beckett Theatre at Theatre Row. The production was directed by Aaron Mark; the costume advisor was Michael Growler; the scenic and lighting design were by Sarah Johnston; the associate lighting designer was Sophie Talmadge Silleck; the production stage manager was Kaleigh Bernier; and the assistant stage manager was Craig M. Rosenthal. The play was performed by Alison Fraser.

SQUEAMISH was developed through New York Theatre Workshop's summer residency at Dartmouth College and a Labyrinth Theater Company Barn Series presentation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## CHARACTERS

SHARON, fifties/sixties, a New York psychotherapist

*The actress playing Sharon also plays:*

BECKY, fifties, Sharon's sister in Texas

BURT, fifties, Becky's husband

CARA, twenty-one, Eddie's girlfriend

JOANIE, thirties, a friend of Cara's

DANTE, forties, another friend of Cara's

BETTY, seventies, a dominatrix

# SQUEAMISH

*The spare suggestion of a psychiatrist's home office in an Upper West Side apartment. There's a large window upstage, through which we may or may not see something of a New York skyline; it's dark out and we're nine floors up. In the center of the room, a black armchair with a black throw blanket on the back, next to which is a black side table and a lamp (with a black shade, ideally), from which comes the only notable light in the room. A cell phone and a black coffee mug sit on the table. Sharon, in a black dress and black shoes, sits in the chair.*

SHARON. You know something, Dr. Schneider? I missed you. It really hit me in that cab, I have *no one* else to—You are the *only* person I can trust now. I don't say that lightly. You're very important in my life. A shrink's shrink, that's a very—well, I'm not an M.D. like you, fine, I can't prescribe, I'm just a therapist, but still, it's quite a *potent* relationship. And in the what, fifteen years I've been coming to you, I don't think a week's gone by without checking in on the phone, at least, but I realize you haven't heard a word from me in five months. During which time I feel like I've become another—Let's just say, a lot's happened. Since I've seen you.

And I need you to know, I would *never*—never in a million years would I just descend on you at home like this, in the middle of the night, unannounced, if I hadn't been—absolutely desperate. And—scared. Genuinely scared. That I'd...I really might've done something. To myself. Or to...someone. I don't know. I need help. Clearly. And I know you *were* trying to help, you were just trying to talk to me, so for me to completely lose it at you like that, so uncharacteristically—oh god, I'm just humiliated, but I really am calm now—Look, I'm calm.

*She sips from the black coffee mug.*

And you were absolutely right when you said I have to talk it all through, no matter how long it takes, so if you're still willing to listen, at this ungodly hour, I've certainly got a second wind now, but I'm not even quite sure where to...

*She takes another sip and puts the mug down on the table.*

Well—when did I see you last? Five months ago, that was the summer. And I'd just had my birthday, as you'll recall, so now I'm the age my mother was when she killed herself. Happy birthday to me. And I'm not struggling financially the way she was, and I don't have children to worry about, but I'd been starting to get a sense of what she must've been...of the pain she must've been in. To act that way. Toward—well, *me*, for one, and my sister. And understanding is good, forgiveness is good, but—Understanding can be a terrifying thing. Identification. With someone who, you know—commits suicide. An emotionally abusive quasi-religious world-class narcissist alcoholic chain-smoker who completely drains your soul, and yet somehow remains one of the smartest, most compelling people on the planet. And then kills herself. That's who I'm—That's who my mother was. At *my age*. Now. So there's that.

And this was of course exacerbated by my immense guilt, because I'd started falling asleep in—well, it only happened twice, but still—I fell asleep in front of my patients. One was that rabbi who was obsessed with bungee jumping, you remember that? And the second was one of the anorexic girls from Columbia, fell asleep right in front of her. And I know you said that's actually not terribly uncommon, but nevertheless, my guilt was just—this gnawing feeling that I'm of absolutely no use to anyone anymore. I used to get such satisfaction from helping my patients, but after what, two decades of doing this, I still can't keep *myself* stable, how the hell am I supposed to expect anyone else to trust me? Let alone *pay* to trust me?

And maybe all that was enough, or maybe my antidepressants would've worn off on their own, like they do every nine months or so anyway. Or maybe I'm some alien creature and I'm just fundamentally not equipped to participate in this indulgent, needy, whiny, vain, overmedicated digital age, where nobody can sit still for



five minutes, nobody knows how to have a basic human interaction anymore, we're all pretending that any of this is remotely sustainable, as if we're not all still dying alone; miserable, defeated, and alone.

Regardless, you wanted to up my dosage again, and I had indeed just started taking twenty more milligrams a day, which had no effect whatsoever. I know you know all this already, Dr. Schneider, but like you said, I have to talk this all through for myself as much as for you.

Anyway, that's when Eddie came to New York to visit—my nephew, Eddie—in June, when I flew him up from Lubbock for his twenty-fourth birthday. Because I hadn't seen him since—well, three years ago, when he was in the hospital. You remember that? He'd been struggling with rather severe bulimia, and then he was cutting himself, and Becky found his razors, she pulled him out of school, sent him to an inpatient program in Dallas, I paid for most of it. And I'd flown down to Texas to see him in the hospital, this sweet, lost twenty-one-year-old kid, this pale shell, trapped in there with the patients getting electroshock, he was *petrified*.

And I hadn't seen him since then, that's why I flew him up here in June—and he was a completely different person. He couldn't have *grown* since I'd seen him, but maybe his posture—He was taller somehow. And there was color in his cheeks, and he'd cut off all his hair, and he'd become—How shall I put this nicely—*hygienic*. He smelled very strongly of *peppermint*, I remember.

And he wasn't cutting himself anymore, he wasn't purging; in fact, not only was he keeping food down, but he wanted to buy groceries and *cook*. Because this girlfriend he had was teaching him to cook, this girl he met in his *outpatient* program, and she was some kind of naturalist, I guess, organic, whatever she was, and he'd just moved into her place, they were living together. And she'd gotten him to go off caffeine, which to me, the coffee junkie, that was absolutely inconceivable.

But then, the most baffling of all: He'd gone off all his meds. He'd actually done it. Eddie was medicated since he was what, nine years old? Ritalin first, then a series of antidepressants; Lexapro, Effexor, Wellbutrin. He went off it all. And he was *fine*. He was in love and

he was happy.

And he was thinking about going back to school, but for now, he was working at the Gray Suites Express in Lubbock, just working his hotel desk job. And he was such an invaluable sounding board for me, you know, because I was going through what I was going through about my mother, and about the world being a hateful place of doom, etcetera, and he was my—well he's the only family I've got. Actually, that's not true at all, but he's the only family I like.

And he said he didn't know who he really was until he went off his meds. That all these years, he thought something was "wrong" with him, something that needed to be "corrected." But there he was, my sweet nephew, the happiest I'd ever seen him.

And that really struck me, you know, because I took my first drink at fourteen, and then I was drunk for a good twenty years, until my mother's suicide, when I got sober, and then I'd been on anti-depressants since then—and constant caffeine that entire time—so thirteen, fourteen years old, that was the last time I didn't have some kind of drug in my system.

And of course that's why... Well that was *our* issue, Dr. Schneider. Once Eddie went home, when I wanted to go off my meds. Because I needed to find out who I really am. *Now*. Without dependence on some substance, some chemical substance. And at the rate I'd been going, adding twenty milligrams every nine months or whatever it was, what, I'd be taking fistfuls of pills for the rest of my life just to maintain some kind of status quo. That's my goal, a *status quo*? There's got to be something better than that. Eddie found something better, I saw evidence of that.

And to terminate treatment with you so suddenly, after fifteen years, I realize that was drastic, and the last thing I ever want to do is offend you, but you were so emphatic about keeping me medicated, just keeping me numb, and I couldn't...I couldn't be drugged, and I couldn't be under watch. Anymore.

So. Then... What you don't know is that I weaned myself off. Without supervision. Of course I know that's irresponsible, but that's what I did, it's just what I did. And my anxiety shot through the roof.

Anxiety like before I was on the meds in the first place, back when I got sober. That feeling my skin's about to split open, I'm listening to these privileged, coddled people with good insurance moaning on and on about their lives while the world is falling apart around us. People are shooting each other every day, we're facing irreversible climate change, we're on the brink of nuclear annihilation, and all anybody in this country wants to do is take pictures of themselves or their stupid food! We are losing our humanity! Our humanity is devolving faster than we can comprehend, but I'm not helping, am I? No—I'm part of the problem! Because maybe I've got an opportunity to actually help somebody, let's say, doing what I do, but all I'm capable of is sitting there in my nice chair, with my nice coffee, and my nice shoes, digging into my pressure points, sweating bullets, grinding my teeth, not even pretending I'm listening anymore, just trying to live through another panic attack.

So I called Eddie—this was October by now, and I was just calling for support, I guess, or validation, and my sister Becky answered his phone. And she said she was just about to call me. To tell me that he...died. He killed himself. At twenty-four. And that the funeral was...whenever the funeral was. Later that week.

He was... They found him in his—Cara found him—Cara's his girlfriend—in their bathtub. He'd—bled out. He had—cuts—on his... I can't think about his cuts.

And I know I should've called you, Dr. Schneider—I almost *did* call you, but I was—embarrassed—because on some level I knew you were right. And I was in some kind of duel. With myself, I guess. For control, I guess. So I cancel my patients, and I fly to Texas. Without my pills.

And it's October, but it must be ninety-five degrees in Lubbock—flat Lubbock—and it's like a ghost town compared to New York, that's one of the reasons I fled this place the day I turned eighteen. And I rent a car, a little white Ford Focus, and I drive to the Gray Suites Express, the hotel where Eddie'd been working. It's three floors, but only a handful of cars parked. The sign outside's turned yellow, like a rotting tooth. And a musty lobby with all this floral-print furniture everywhere. Looks like a college kid behind the front desk—He

# SQUEAMISH

by Aaron Mark

1 woman

Sharon, an Upper West Side shrink, longtime recovering alcoholic, and world-class hemophobe, finds herself in the South Plains of Texas—off her psychotropic drugs—after her nephew’s sudden death. SQUEAMISH is a grotesque tale of phobia and compulsion, a minimalist work of psychological horror about craving what terrifies us most.

*“...Sharon is an entertaining raconteur whose ordinary life has taken a Grand Guignol turn. ...SQUEAMISH is a play about blood—the fluid that flows through our veins, the kinship we feel or don’t for our own families, the temperaments that we struggle to keep in balance. ...Though we see the play’s considerable gore...only through the mind’s eye, SQUEAMISH is probably not for the squeamish.”*  
—**The New York Times**

*“...[a] tour de fear... As we watch this sophisticated and stylish New Yorker gleefully transform into a monster, her gory self-discovery is utterly horrifying.”*  
—**Time Out New York**

*“...[Mark] specializes [in] sending chills up and down spines with his solo theatrical thrillers... To call SQUEAMISH a bloody good time may be too obvious a pun, but Aaron Mark once again displays a sharp skill for descriptive and entertaining storytelling.”* —**BroadwayWorld.com**

*“...A horror-laced monologue about the aftermath of a suicide that will likely twist your innards and disturb your sleep. ...It’s theater at its most provocative. Consider yourself warned.”*  
—**Theasy.com**

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